

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
 INTERVIEW, WITH JAMES BAKER, WITH TIM RUSSERT ON NBC-TV PROGRAM,
 "MEET THE PRESS," AND ELAINE SCIOLO
 PORTSMOUTH, ENGLAND
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MR. RUSSERT: And with us now, the secretary of defense, William Perry.

Mr. Secretary, good morning. Good afternoon

SEC. PERRY: Good morning, Tim. Good afternoon in England.

MR. RUSSERT: Good to see you. While you're there celebrating the events of D-Day 50 years later, another crisis confronting the world at this moment 50 years after D-Day, North Korea. Yesterday, the president said that the North Koreans could still avoid sanctions if. If what? What must they do?

SEC. PERRY: Well, let me, first of all, put it in context, Tim. What we are trying to -- what our objective is here -- we go back to several decades ago when President Kennedy forecasted there were going to be several dozen nations that had nuclear weapons, and because of that concern, an international organization was formed, an international treaty was put together, and that has been remarkably successful in preventing that proliferation in nuclear weapons. The organization, of course, was the International Atomic Energy Agency, and at the moment, what we're confronted with is the challenge of North Korea, who had accepted the Non-Proliferation Treaty and had accepted the inspections of the International Atomic Energy Agency, rejecting or refusing or turning down the demands for inspection. So what is at stake here is this whole nonproliferation issue, and that's what we're trying to deal with.

MR. RUSSERT: All right. What must the Koreans do to avoid sanctions as the president stated yesterday? (Pause.) Mr. Secretary, what must the Koreans -- North Koreans do --

SEC. PERRY: I've lost audio.

MR. RUSSERT: What must the North -- can you hear me now, sir? Mr. Secretary, can you hear me?

All right. We're going to take a quick break and try to reestablish audio with the secretary of defense, William Perry, in Portsmouth, England. We'll be right back after this break.

(Announcements.)

SEC. PERRY: We're back on Meet the Press. While we try to reestablish communications with Secretary of Defense Perry in England, we're going to be joined by former Secretary of State James Baker, take things out of order here a little

bit.

Mr. Secretary, welcome back to Meet the Press.

MR. BAKER: Thank you, Tim.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me begin with you on the problem of North Korea. If you were in power now as secretary of state or as president, what would you do right now about North Korea?

MR. BAKER: Well, I think that what we probably should have done a while ago, Tim, is to make it clear to the North Koreans that we're serious about this; that when we say something, we mean it. I think really that we've tried the diplomatic approach, and it was appropriate to do that, but we may have tried that diplomatic approach for a bit too long, and I'm not sure that the North Koreans understand how seriously we take the fact that they're not willing to abide by the IAEA requirements.

I don't think you should ever sit down and try and negotiate down from international standards and requirements with a regime like North Korea. I think that would be not unlike our doing the same with Saddam Hussein, for instance, with respect to the U.N. resolutions requiring him to get out of Kuwait. These are standard international requirements. And I don't think you negotiate over those or compromise over those.

I frankly think that we should have been in the Security Council before now with respect to sanctions, and if we're not able to get sanctions in the Security Council, then we should be trying to do it ad hoc, with an ad hoc coalition, because the major countries in Asia certainly agree with us that there should not be a nuclear capability on the Korean peninsula. And I think we could bring to bear a significant international coalition and international support behind those sanctions.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me go back to 1989. According to the CIA, that's when the reprocessing starting and North Korea developed the capability for one or two bombs. That happened on your watch. The Bush administration canceled Team Spirit, joint exercises with South Korea, in 1992. Can a case be made that the Clinton administration inherited

this crisis from you?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't think a case can be made that they inherited this crisis. They inherited the problem of North Korea perhaps, but you know, after 17 months, Tim, you -- I think you stop suggesting that all of your problems were inherited and you start taking responsibility for your own policies.

We did not sit down and try and negotiate with the North Koreans down from the internationally accepted standards. Yes, we canceled Team Spirit, because -- and in exchange for that, we got negotiation or discussions with the North Koreans respecting continued adherence to the international atomic energy guidelines.

MR. RUSSERT: Would you consider two things? One, a preemptive military strike? And, two, should we begin immediately beefing up our military forces in anticipation of an invasion by the North?

MR. BAKER: Well, as you well know, we're committed to defend the South. There's been a lot of saber-rattling by North Korea. There have been some very, very provocative statements made. We have a commitment there that we have to -- that we are obligated to keep, and I am quite confident that the United States, regardless of our leadership, is going to keep that commitment.

I don't think that now is the time to talk about going in with a preemptive strike, although that is certainly a policy option that has been considered and kept in mind, but it occurs to me that for over 40 years -- it's interesting here on the 50th anniversary of D-Day, we are celebrating the fact that in the aftermath of that war, for over 40 years, the United States maintained -- the United States and its allies maintained peace in Western Europe against a tremendous conventional threat from the Soviet Union. We did that in part through a nuclear deterrence that worked. We still have that deterrence.

I'm not suggesting certainly any use of that or anything, or even a public threatening, but I would hope that we have at least privately communicated to the North Koreans that we

have an obligation to defend the South and if they're going to start making threats of war, which after all they did and are doing, I think it's appropriate to privately call to their attention the fact that we have this deterrent and that it did keep the peace in Europe for over 40 years.

MR. RUSSERT: How about sending troops and armaments to Korea?

MR. BAKER: Well, we certainly should be doing whatever is appropriate, whatever the president, the secretary of defense, and others in authority think is appropriate to defend and protect the 38,000 Americans that we have on the 38th Parallel, particularly in the face of not implied, but expressed threats by North Korea to take action.

MR. RUSSERT: You say -- Mr. Secretary, you've said that the diplomatic route has not worked thus far. What should President Clinton do today? Go to the Japanese and go to the Chinese --

MR. BAKER: Absolutely.

MR. RUSSERT: -- and go to the North Koreans and say, "Let us in or else"?

MR. BAKER: No. We should be going -- in fact, we are required to go -- under the IAEA requirements, we are required now to go back to the Security Council -- not we, but everybody else -- because North Korea has been found to be in violation of its undertakings. So we should be, in effect, I think, as -- we should be exercising U.S. leadership. We should be rounding up the votes that are necessary to obtain those sanctions in the Security Council. And if we can't get them in the Security Council, if somebody's going to veto, then we should do it outside the Security Council, but people suggest China would veto economic sanctions. I don't believe they will.

MR. RUSSERT: How serious should the sanctions be?

MR. BAKER: Well, I think first you start with economic sanctions, then you move to political and diplomatic sanctions. The fact of the matter is it would be, I think, a reasonably easy thing to do to isolate a renegade nation like North Korea in the face of the kinds of threats that they're making. And I think we should be,

and should have been, taking the leadership to do that.

MR. RUSSERT: Secretary Baker, can you hold just right there? I think we've reestablished contact with Secretary of Defense Perry in England.

Mr. Secretary, are you there?

SEC. PERRY: Yes, Tim --

MR. RUSSERT: Fine. We began our --

SEC. PERRY: -- I hear you fine now.

MR. RUSSERT: Thank you very much. We began our conversations talking about sanctions for North Korea. What kind of sanctions are we talking about?

SEC. PERRY: We have discussions underway with our allies at this point on the particular sanctions and on -- and we'll be discussing that with the other members of the Security Council. They'll be intensive and detailed discussions over the next week or so. I think it's premature to try to specify at this point what kind of sanctions are going to come out.

MR. RUSSERT: Secretary Baker has suggested that, if the United Nations does not go along with sanctions, perhaps we should do so on our own or within a consortium of our allies outside the United Nations.

SEC. PERRY: That's entirely possible.

MR. RUSSERT: How serious is the threat today, Mr. Secretary, of a potential war in North Korea?

SEC. PERRY: I do not think we are facing imminent danger of a military confrontation. I don't want -- I am concerned that North Korea is making bellicose statements. I'm concerned with the posture of their military forces. But they've had those military forces in North Korea now for many years. I'm concerned about the bomb development program they're on. All of these are matters of great concern, but it does not lead us to believe that there's a danger of imminent military confrontation.

MR. RUSSERT: Will there --

SEC. PERRY: Certainly we're not seeking, we will not provoke, a war. But at the same time, we will not invite a war by not being ready. My concern as the secretary of defense is to be sure we have sufficient readiness of our

forces, and, of course, of the South Korean forces, to meet any contingency that develops.

MR. RUSSERT: Senator John McCain, former prisoner of war, Republican senator from Arizona, has said we should begin immediately to beef up our military forces in South Korea. Are there any plans to do that?

SEC. PERRY: We have been building up our forces over the last six months. We will continue to develop them as necessary as the situation on the ground warrants. My judgment and the judgment of the command forces combined are -- pardon me, the command forces commander in Korea, Gary Luck -- that we have adequate forces at this time to defend South Korea. But if the situation gets more dangerous -- if, for example, the North Koreans were to move their forces closer to the border or to go into some sort of a war status, then we would take further actions. We are watching this very closely and will take whatever actions are necessary.

MR. RUSSERT: In July of 1993, President Clinton was asked what would the United States do in response to a North Korean attack on the South, and he said, quote, "We would retaliate. It would mean the end of their country as they knew it." Is that still our stated policy?

SEC. PERRY: We will defend South Korea. We have a commitment to defend South Korea. We are prepared to defend South Korea. We are capable of defending South Korea. And any war that would be started would have devastating consequences on North Korea.

MR. RUSSERT: And if the North Koreans opted to use a nuclear device, we would respond in kind?

SEC. PERRY: Tim, I think this whole talk of war is quite premature and it's creating a sort of a hysteria which is not appropriate to the present situation. We are seeking peaceful resolution of the problem. We're seeking to have North Korea comply with the agreements they've made on the International Atomic Energy Agency, under the nonproliferation treaty. We have, I think, a good prospect of success in that. Our readiness measures are prudential measures that we're taking, but we are not anticipating a war. And

as I said, I believe the discussion of war is entirely premature.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Secretary, on April 3rd on this program you said that you would not at this time, under these circumstances, consider a preemptive strike; you would rule it out. Is that still our policy?

SEC. PERRY: A preemptive strike is an option which is open. I don't believe I would recommend that option today under these circumstances. As I said, we do not see the danger of a war at this time and we're not going to take actions to provoke a war.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Secretary, Secretary Baker and many others, as you know, have suggested that there is a credibility problem with American foreign policy in light of the U.S. position switches on Bosnia, China, Haiti. Why do you think the North Koreans will take what you say this morning seriously?

SEC. PERRY: The North Koreans are, I believe, among other things, pragmatists and realists. They understand fully the capability of the combined forces in South Korea. They also understand fully the capability of the United States to rapidly reinforce in a matter of days, if need be, over there. So I believe, first of all, they understand our capability.

And secondly, let me speak to the government of the people of North Korea, just as President Clinton did. We are prepared to defend South Korea. We are committed to defend South Korea. And there should be no hesitation or no ambiguity on that point.

MR. RUSSERT: Elaine.

MS. SCIOLINO: Yes. Mr. Secretary, if I could just ask you a peace question on North Korea since you don't want to be in a war mode against North Korea.

SEC. PERRY: Yes.

MS. SCIOLINO: What would be the goal of any sanctions against North Korea? In Haiti, for example, we have sanctions. The goal is to rid the country of the military leadership, restore Aristide. What would be the goal of sanctions against North Korea? Would it be to slap the North Koreans on the hand because they've been cheating in the international inspections? Would

it be to freeze their nuclear program in place? Or would it be to roll back the entire nuclear program?

SEC. PERRY: There are two quite different goals, Elaine. The first goal is to establish the integrity of the International Atomic Energy Agency inspection. That is to say, we want -- we have at stake here the whole nonproliferation program, not just for the benefit of the United States but for the benefit of the whole world. And so that is the first thing that is at stake, that a nation who signs up to the nonproliferation treaty undertakes certain commitments. North Korea has violated those commitments and there have to be appropriate actions taken as a result of that, so that the message goes out to the whole world that you cannot flaunt the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspection regime. That's the first one.

The second one is we want to put pressure on North Korea to get them to modify their behavior. What are we trying to influence in their behavior? First of all and most importantly is the future development of nuclear weapons. It is very important to get the future development of nuclear weapons, the future production of nuclear weapons, curtailed in Korea. And secondly, we would like to go back and determine whether or not they have actually developed and deployed nuclear bombs already, as we have estimated; and if so, to get those nuclear bombs removed.

Now, all of that cannot be done on sanctions alone. All of that cannot be done through the IAEA provisions alone, but that is a very important ingredient in trying to achieve those objectives. It's an indispensable ingredient to those objectives.

MS. SCIOLINO: And this administration honestly believes that the behavior of North Korea's leadership can be modified?

SEC. PERRY: I think that's the first step we have to take, to try to modify it. As we apply sanctions, the North Korean economy, as you know, is in desperate condition, and even modest economic sanctions will be very painful to North Korea. So it is an important step, and I believe sanctions can be effective relative to the

economic situation in North Korea today.

MS. SCIOLINO: Mr. Secretary, if I could turn to another issue of great concern to this country, and that is Haiti. In your conversations with the allies, you've been very pessimistic about the ability of the Haitian military to reform itself. You have told some of the allies that the rot in the military runs pretty deep. Are there any chances of rehabilitating the Haitian military, or would you have to start from scratch with an entirely new military that the United States would probably have to train?

SEC. PERRY: We have -- if we go into Haiti with any kind of a peacekeeping force, as we have considered under the U.N. provisions in the past, one element of that would be redeveloping, retraining a security force in Korea (sic/means Haiti) to include both the military and the police. We have been joined, for example, by Canada in the commitment to help provide training for their police force. We would want to use as much of the existing military and police force as was capable. How much of that could actually be used, how much we'd have to start over from scratch, I can't say at this time, Elaine. But we would -- the objective would be to build up a security force in Haiti which was compatible with a democratic society.

MS. SCIOLINO: And what kind of a military involvement are we talking about on the part of the United States? How many American trainers and troops would be involved and how long would the United States and perhaps its allies have to stay in Haiti, were you to restore Aristide to power?

SEC. PERRY: I can't give you exact numbers of how many thousands of peacekeeping forces would be required or how long it would take. But it's not an insignificant number; certainly talking about several thousands of security forces. And it's not a short time. You're not talking about weeks; you're talking about months.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Secretary, if Mr. Aristide was reinstated, do you think the Haitian military would support him?

SEC. PERRY: They have -- many of the military leaders have said not. I think it may

very well be a function, though, of this security training that we're talking about, the redevelopment of the security force. And any security force that is established in Haiti would have to be supporting the democratic government running the country. That gets back to Elaine's first question as to how much of the security force could be retained.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Aristide on Friday suggested that the United States take action; quote, "a surgical move to remove the thugs within hours." Is that being contemplated?

SEC. PERRY: All of our action right now, as you know, is being directed to following up on the new and the tougher sanctions which were imposed a few weeks ago, on the one hand. On the second hand, we have a fair amount of activity underway to establish a new processing center for the refugees from Haiti. Both of those, the actions are underway right now; not military actions.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Secretary, as you know, President Yeltsin of Russia said there would not be joint military exercises with American and Russian troops in Russia. Will such exercises ever be held? And will they be held in the United States?

SEC. PERRY: I believe so. We will certainly -- I think it's very desirable to have joint peacekeeping exercises with the Russians. We have from the beginning proposed these joint exercises to be held both in the United States and Russia. And I'm certainly open to having the first set of exercises in the United States, and maybe the second set of exercises in Russia. We will discuss this in the relatively near future with the minister of defense and see what kind of a program we can develop.

MR. RUSSERT: Mr. Secretary, we thank you for joining us this morning. We again apologize for the technical difficulties. And please have a safe trip home and we'll see you when you get back home.

SEC. PERRY: Thank you, Tim and Elaine.

MR. RUSSERT: We'll be right back after this message.

(Announcements.)

MR. RUSSERT: We're talking with the

former secretary of state, James Baker, a little bit out of order this morning. We've already talked to the secretary about North Korea. Elaine Sciolino, I think you have some questions about Bosnia for the secretary of state.

MS. SCIOLINO: Yes. Mr. Baker, it was the Bush administration that led the campaign to impose an arms embargo against the whole of the former Yugoslavia, including Bosnia. In retrospect, was this a colossal mistake?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't think it was. I think that efforts probably could have been made a bit earlier to lift that aspect of it that applied to Bosnia. Once the fighting spread to Bosnia, as you recall, Elaine, initially it was a conflict primarily between Serbia, on the one hand, and Croatia on the other. And what the United States was doing was leading the way, exercising leadership with respect to both economic and political sanctions.

The Bush administration made a determination that we would not use military force in the former Yugoslavia. You can argue with respect to whether that was the right decision or the wrong decision, but we didn't send any mixed signals. We said, "No, this is not one for us. This is one for the Europeans. It's in their backyard." If you recall 1991, Europe was unifying and so forth, and we had just come off of fighting a pretty substantial war ourselves in the Persian Gulf. We had peace talks in the Middle East and so forth. So I don't think at the time leading in terms of trying to prevent the humanitarian nightmare that subsequently occurred was the wrong action. I think it was the right action.

MS. SCIOLINO: But in retrospect, wasn't there a crucial mistake made when the Bush administration decided this is a European problem, it's not an American problem, and there never was a credible threat of force, let alone the use of military force, which seemed to give the Serbs the green light to do whatever they wanted to in Bosnia?

MR. BAKER: Well, with 20/20 hindsight, I think we can now say that European unity didn't happen. The Europeans approached the former Yugoslavia from three or four different

perspectives. We still don't have European union. It would have been, I think, ideal if at that time we had been able to make the break-up of the former Yugoslavia a responsibility of the NATO alliance or a mission of the NATO alliance. Unfortunately, our allies were not prepared to redefine the alliance at that time.

I think it would be, for instance, useful today if the North Atlantic alliance would undertake, as a mission, the prevention of the spread of that war, let's say, to Macedonia; the prevention of a broader Balkan war. This, of course, would involve U.S. forces. It would involve the United States making a determination that we had a sufficient national interest to do that. But I think we do have, because when Europe is engulfed in war -- and this would be a much broader Balkan war than we now have in Bosnia -- somehow the United States is always involved. It's quite appropriate, I think, to recall that on this 50th anniversary of D-Day.

MS. SCIOLINO: But, sir, you've been quite critical of the Clinton administration for not taking a leadership role in the world. And in retrospect, didn't the United States really abrogate its responsibility with regard to the former Yugoslavia? You went to Belgrade in mid-1991 and set the stage for -- you said that it was necessary to keep the former Yugoslavia together, which --

MR. BAKER: Which, in retrospect, was the right policy. It's too bad that we departed from that policy, we and our European allies, by recognizing Croatia, who, through unilateral determination which foreclosed negotiation, declared her independence, seized border posts in violation of the Helsinki principles. The policy of maintaining the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia was not just the policy of the United States. It was the policy of all of Europe. And it's too bad we didn't stick with that policy.

I do not agree with you, Elaine, that we abrogated our leadership role. I've just told you we led the way. We led Europe in the imposition of economic and political sanctions. We were unwilling, and we made it very clear that we were not willing, to put American lives at risk in the former Yugoslavia. That's a lot

different than threatening the use of force and backing off and that sort of thing. And it's that, of course, that I have been critical of.

Let me also, though, take the occasion to say that I think there are many areas in which this administration has done the right thing in foreign policy. I don't want to just be seen to be a critic, because I've tried also to support them in their policy toward Russia, with the exception of the expansion of NATO. I've supported them strongly with respect to NAFTA and GATT and their policy toward Iraq and their policy toward the Middle East.

On the other hand, I think it's fair where I see what appears to be, to me, at least, a leadership problem, to call attention to that.

MR. RUSSERT: One of those areas is Haiti. One, do you think our policy should be to reinstate President Aristide? And two, should the United States use military force to carry that out?

MR. BAKER: Answer to question one, yes. Answer to question two, no. We shouldn't use military force because we don't have support for it here even within this hemisphere. I think the OAS would strongly condemn a unilateral U.S. move to do that. I do not think force should be used in the absence of support from the OAS.

MR. RUSSERT: Well, do you think President Aristide is the legitimate head of Haiti?

MR. BAKER: He was the elected -- I think you have to take what democracy gives you. It's been our policy, it was our policy during the Bush administration, to support the reinstallation or to support Aristide as the duly-elected president of Haiti. Just because you don't agree or like somebody, if you believe in democracy, I think you take what democracy gives you.

MR. RUSSERT: At the end of last week, President Clinton met with the pope. And the pope criticized President Clinton for a U.S. policy -- he called it advocating population control through abortion, contraception and sterilization. Is the U.S. policy at the Cairo conference the correct one towards population control?

MR. BAKER: I'm not sure I know exactly what the policy is at the Cairo conference, Tim.

If you can enlighten me on that a little bit --

MR. RUSSERT: Well, according to the National Council of Bishops and the pope, as he told President Clinton, it is to provide abortion on demand, contraception and sterilization. It is in conflict with the Mexico City policy of 1984 --

MR. BAKER: Yeah, well --

MR. RUSSERT: -- where, under your tenure as secretary of state, the United States would not give any money --

MR. BAKER: To countries that supported abortion. I think that was the right policy. That's the policy we pursued for 12 years. If the policy -- if the Cairo conference policy is the antithesis of that, then I wouldn't agree with the Cairo conference policy.

MR. RUSSERT: The whole issue of abortion in the Republican Party is an interesting one. Former Vice President Quayle said a few weeks ago that the whole idea of Roe v. Wade is -- "I want to set that aside, that the constitutional issues are settled for the time being," as he said. In 1992, the Republican platform called for a total ban on all abortions without exception. Is that a prudent position?

MR. BAKER: I think that it's important that we be a party of inclusion. I think in politics you have to be inclusive and not exclusive. I do not think that we nor, frankly, the other party ought to have these litmus test issues that you have to measure up to under any and all circumstances and conditions.

Having said that, I would tell you that the only time I've ever run for public office, I ran on a right-to-life platform because I believed it, and I do believe it. I find it morally difficult and, in fact, reprehensible. And therefore, I think there ought to be room for people in the Republican Party who espouse all views. And whether you -- if a majority think that ought to be in the platform, then it ought to be a platform position, but not something that you would use to exclude people of a different viewpoint.

MR. RUSSERT: Perhaps leave it to the states rather than the federal government?

MR. BAKER: Well, that was the position that President Ford took when I was his campaign

manager in 1976.

MR. RUSSERT: What do you think of it?

MR. BAKER: Perhaps that's a reasonable approach. As a conservative, I have to tell you, even though I ran on a right-to-life amendment platform, I find it a little difficult to understand, as a conservative, the government taking that kind of an activist approach in personal lives.

MR. RUSSERT: Vice President Quayle, as you know, wrote a book, and he said some very negative things about you. One is as follows: Quote, "On almost every matter that came before him, he wanted to know what was in it for Jim Baker."

MR. BAKER: I would have been really surprised if you hadn't asked me that question this morning, Tim. But let me tell you, I haven't read the book. And therefore --

MR. RUSSERT: Well, but I just read you the quote.

MR. BAKER: Well, I know, but I can't --

MR. RUSSERT: That's verbatim.

MR. BAKER: I can't comment on a book that I haven't read. I will say this. With respect to that report or excerpt and others, if those excerpts are true -- and I haven't read the book, and I'd be delighted to comment on it to you once I've read it -- if those are true, then it's a little disappointing, because in all the years that we worked together, he never once expressed those views directly to me.

MR. RUSSERT: He also went on -- and this is a quote. You don't have to read it; I'll read it for you. I'll save you some time. "There were times I thought Baker would be satisfied with coming close in the race, just turning a debacle into a squeaker. Jim Baker set things up that if he managed to win, he'd look like Houdini. If we lost, nobody would blame him."

MR. BAKER: Well, you know, that's giving me an awful lot of credit for being able to do something in a presidential campaign that I don't think anybody could do, set something up like that. The fact of the matter is, I resigned as secretary of state to support the re-election of my close friend of 35 years, and I gave it everything I had.

MR. RUSSERT: Would you like to be

president?

MR. BAKER: Tim, I have watched the office from close range through three presidents. I've been privileged to serve three presidents. I haven't formed a PAC. I haven't been to New Hampshire. Contrary to some published reports, I'm not out there telling people to keep their powder dry. But when people ask me a question like that, the one thing I do say is that I don't think it's appropriate, particularly now, to rule it out. I think the talk of presidential politics in 1994 is not good for we Republicans, because I think we've got some terrific opportunities to pick up Senate seats and to pick up governorships, and I'm doing what I can out there to try and help some of our candidates.

MR. RUSSERT: To talk about picking up Senate seats, doing what you can, will you campaign for Oliver North for the Senate for Virginia?

MR. BAKER: Well, I agreed with Jim Miller when he said yesterday now is the time for Virginia Republicans to unite. I've spent the last 19 years working for a Republican Party and for Republican candidates, both presidential and other. And I think it's important that we elect Republicans. So my answer to that, I suppose, would be, if asked, why not?

MR. RUSSERT: Well, why not, because Ronald Reagan said that Oliver North's a liar, that he said false statements. Norman Schwarzkopf says he has concern with his ethics and integrity. Colin Powell said he has no confidence in his ability to be in the Senate. John Warner said he's an embarrassment.

MR. BAKER: Yeah. Yeah, you have a lot of things happen in primaries that, when it becomes your party against the other party, you find a way to gloss over or to look around and that sort of thing. What I've said to you is I don't expect to be asked, but if I were, why not? I mean, that's something I would consider at the time.

MR. RUSSERT: President Reagan questioned that Mr. North -- Oliver North said that he was instructed by President Reagan to lie to Congress. Do you have any knowledge of that? Do you think it occurred?

MR. BAKER: I do not think it occurred. I

would find that extraordinarily difficult to believe.

MR. RUSSERT: What are the major issues -- how would you advise a Republican candidate for the Senate to run this year? What issues should they choose to run on?

MR. BAKER: Well, I think obviously everybody knows that crime and personal security is the issue that cuts the most out there with respect to the American people. And therefore I would suggest that they run forcefully on the Senate crime bill and that they call upon President Clinton to support that bill instead of some watered-down version that might come out of the House.

I think it's appropriate to campaign on curing the problems in health care but doing it in a way that you don't throw the baby out with the bath water. I think it's proper and would be productive for Republican senatorial candidates to campaign on a platform of restoring leadership and credibility in America's foreign and national security policies. And so there are any number of -- but I think primarily just continuing commitment to the principles and values of the Republican Party.

MR. RUSSERT: How politically weak do you think Bill Clinton is at this point?

MR. BAKER: Well, you're a better judge of that than I am, I suppose. I don't know. I think if you believe the polls, the job approval rating is down a little bit now. That doesn't mean that overnight -- you know, overnight's an eternity in politics. That doesn't mean it can't turn around, and turn around pretty quickly. Right now things are not going as well as they might be.

And let me say something about that. You know, foreign policy really never shows in the polls. It's way, way down there. But it's a little bit like the plumbing. Everybody takes it for granted. It's fine as long as it's working. But you let it break and all hell breaks loose. I mean, you start losing men or losing people or seeing the reputation, the credibility of the United States being eroded -- and this is not just Jim Baker saying this; Democratic senators, prominent Democrats are saying this. I think they can turn it around. There are ways to do

that, to restore our credibility. But it's important that we understand that words are the currency of foreign policy.

MR. RUSSERT: Sounds like a rationale for a Jim Baker For President campaign.

MR. BAKER: That's not what it's intended to be.

MR. RUSSERT: Even your closest friends question whether or not you have it in your belly to go from farm to farm in Iowa, glad-handing, back-slapping, trying to retail politics.

MR. BAKER: I'm not making the argument to you here today that I'm going to do that. I've just told you I don't have a PAC. I haven't been to New Hampshire. I'm not telling people to hang loose. But I'm not going to rule it out, and I shouldn't, because I know the job and I've been very close to it and I've held some other jobs that I think would qualify somebody.

MR. RUSSERT: We thank you for joining us, Mr. Secretary. We'll be talking to you in the months and years ahead.

MR. BAKER: Thank you, Tim.